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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [GM](#) [LE](#) [AF](#) [BK](#) [SR](#)

SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARY PRESSURE, GOVERNMENT MISSTEPS  
COMPLICATE DEPLOYMENT ISSUES FOR GRAND COALITION

REF: A. BERLIN 3141

[1](#)B. BERLIN 3142

[1](#)C. BERLIN 3145

[1](#)D. BERLIN 2769

Classified By: DCM John M. Koenig for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Setbacks related to German overseas deployments are reinforcing a tendency toward short-term caution on military issues. Barely one week after the release of a well-received White Paper on security that cast Germany as an increasingly engaged and transformed security partner, Berlin -- especially Defense Minister Jung -- is under pressure on Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Bosnia. The Chancellery in particular is in crisis-management mode with regard to the Bundestag. As Chancellor Merkel looks ahead to the CDU's national party congress November 27-28, she may be especially careful to avoid any mis-steps on foreign policy that might compound the feeding frenzy and weaken her standing within the party and her coalition. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) The Grand Coalition Government was faced last week with bad news from Afghanistan -- photographs of German soldiers mishandling human remains hit the press last week -- and Lebanon -- three separate incidents with Israeli aircraft in the eastern Mediterranean raised fears of an accidental clash between German and Israeli forces (Refs A and B). The public response of the government to these developments has been tentative and largely defensive. To counter anticipated parliamentary objections that German forces were stretched too thin worldwide, Defense Minister Jung announced over the weekend that Germany would begin withdrawing its 850 soldiers in Bosnia in December. This step fed impressions the government was reeling, and it encouraged still more criticism, even though Jung intended the opposite (and indeed, the drawdown actually is consistent with ongoing discussions with EU partners). Merkel reportedly was unhappy with Jung's uncoordinated Bosnia announcement but has stood by him publicly. Chancellery sources have told us they are frustrated by this problem of the government's own making.

[1](#)3. (C) The Chancellery also is particularly worried about losing influence in the Bundestag, with the upcoming renewal of Germany's OEF mandate this month. The constitution and German law on overseas military deployments exacerbate this legislative-management issue: even the relatively small number (ca. 9,000) of deployed troops attracts continual parliamentary and public attention. While senior officials from the Chancellery and Foreign Office would like to see the law changed, they recognize that is not likely in the near-term.

[1](#)4. (C) The White Paper approved by the cabinet October 25 struck a forward-leaning tone and proposed a 50 percent

increase (to 14,000) in the level of ambition for overseas deployments (Ref C). In a matter of days, that positive buzz disappeared amid controversy over ongoing operations. Jung, who travels November 2-3 to Israel and Lebanon, likely will face further criticism when the Bundestag convenes again next week.

15. (C) Domestic politics, where Merkel is beset by criticism over reforms and the CDU's declining popular support, complicates things for the Chancellor as well (Ref D).

Merkel will stand for re-election as CDU chairwoman at the party's November 27-28 congress. While there is no doubt she will be returned with a large majority again, a significant drop from her previous levels of support (she won 98 percent of the vote from her Bundestag caucus in September 2005 on the heels of her successful general election campaign, and won 88 percent party-wide as chairwoman in 2004) could damage her standing within the party. This in turn could encourage the persistent sniping from state-level rivals and contribute to an image of Merkel as a weakened leader at home.

16. (C) Comment: We should continue privately to encourage senior German officials to show strong leadership in explaining their deployments publicly. It is noteworthy that not all criticism from the political class has focused on drawing down deployed forces; the most effective criticism of the UNIFIL deployment, for example, has centered on the possibility that UN mandate was not robust enough and might prevent German forces from stopping Hizballah arms smuggling.

But Merkel may see a high profile on security issues in the immediate future as a risk to her standing within the CDU and the Coalition. A weakened Merkel, on the eve of the NATO Summit, could make more difficult progress toward our goals for the transatlantic relationship.

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